



United States Department of Agriculture

Superior National Forest

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Permit and Visitor Use Trends 2009-2016

USDA Forest Service



Photo by Ann Schwaller



“In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA’s TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.”

Introduction

The following report displays permit and visitor use statistics for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) on the Superior National Forest from 2009 to 2016. The report is organized in six parts.

- Part 1** Displays an overview of quota permits and quota visitors from 2009 to 2016.
- Part 2** Displays the quota permit data by type of use (overnight hiking, overnight paddle, overnight motor, and day use motor) and self-issue permit data during the quota season (day use visitors) and during the non-quota season (all visitors).
- Part 3** Displays quota and self-issue visitor data.
- Part 4** Displays information on the lottery beginning in 2012 when the Forest Service eliminated the lottery for all but five entry points.
- Part 5** Displays more detailed information on self-issue permits and visitors.
- Part 6** Displays exempt permit information and use trends.

Quota permits are required for overnight visitors and day use motor visitors (except day use motor visitors traveling from Crane Lake to Lac La Croix using self-issue permits) from May 1 to September 30. Quota season permit and quota season visitor data is retrieved from the National Recreation Reservation System. Visitors must pick up a quota permit the day of or the day before their trip start date. Quota permits are issued at Superior National Forest Ranger District offices and at select businesses who are under a Cooperator Agreement with the US Forest Service to issue BWCAW permits.

Self-issue permits are required for all day use paddle and hiking visitors during the quota season (May 1 to September 30) and all visitors (day use visitors and overnight visitors) during the non-quota season (October 1 to April 30). Self-issue permits are available at Superior National Forest Ranger District offices and at all BWCAW entry points. It is the visitor's responsibility to fill out the permit accurately to reflect dates, location, and type of activity for the visit. Not all self-issue permits are filled out accurately or completely, and therefore, self-issue permit data is not as accurate as quota data.

For additional information on overall use on the Superior National Forest, check out the National Visitor Use Monitoring report. A 2016 report will be posted in the future, along with previous reports from 2006 and 2011 at: <https://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/>

For information on user fees that are raised through the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, or for additional information about the Superior National Forest, or the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, please contact the Superior National Forest at 218-626-4300.

Part 1. Overview of 2009 to 2016 Quota Permits and Quota Visitors

The majority of use in the BWCAW occurs during the quota season, defined as May 1 to September 30. During the quota season, overnight visitors and day use motor visitors must obtain quota permits. Quota permits have a limited number of permits by date and entry point. **Figures A and B** display the number of quota permits issued and the number of quota visitors from 2009 to 2016. **Table 1** displays the actual number of quota permits, quota visitors, and the average group size.

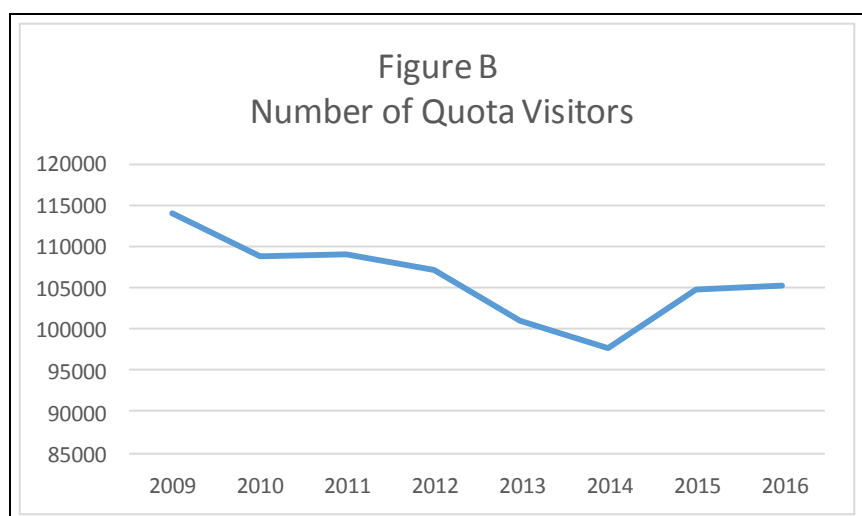
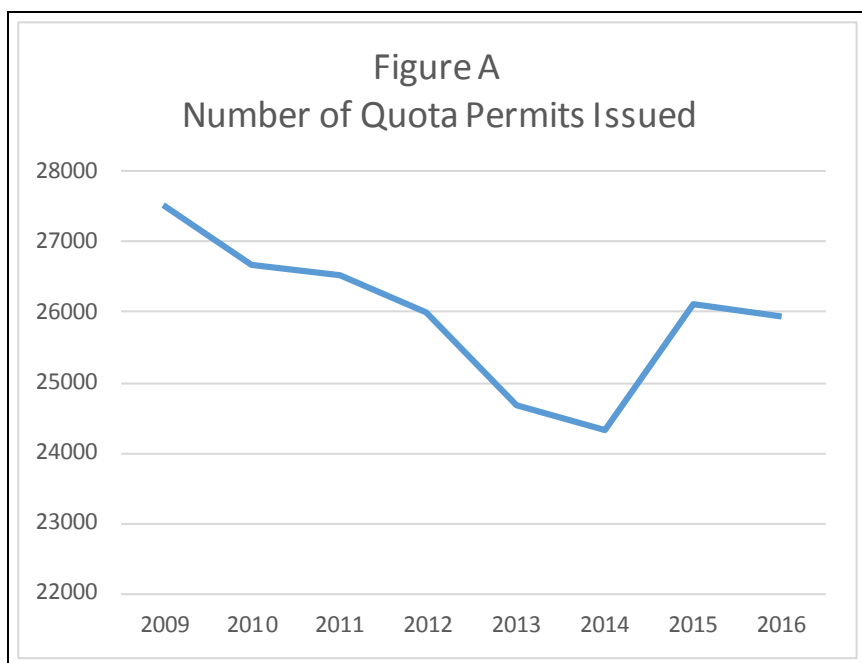


Table 1 Number of Permits and Visitors			
Year	Number of Quota Permits	Quota Visitors	Average Group Size
2009	27503	114031	4.15
2010	26651	108781	4.08
2011	26480	109158	4.12
2012	25966	107257	4.13
2013	24670	100984	4.10
2014	24301	97708	4.02
2015	26094	104880	4.02
2016	25898	105163	4.06

Part 2. Quota and Self-Issue Permit Information

Tables 2 and 3 display the data for both quota permits and self-issue permits. Adding the total quota permit data with the total self-issue permit data equals the total number of permits or groups that entered the BWCAW from 2009 to 2016.

Table 2								
Type of Quota Permit								
Type of Quota Permit	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Day Use Motor	5228	5285	5054	4789	4362	4367	4563	4335
Overnight Hiking	244	240	235	259	266	230	355	355
Overnight Motor	1548	1487	1456	1398	1234	1197	1283	1246
Overnight Paddle	20483	19639	19735	19520	18808	18507	19893	19962
Total Quota Permits	27503	26651	26480	25966	24670	24301	26094	25898

Table 3								
Self-Issue Permits								
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Self-Issue Permits (May-September)	8832	9506	10488	9992	9738	8553	9466	11194
Self-Issue Permits (October-April)	3051	4343	3588	3918	3345	3179	4168	3990
Total Self-Issue Permits	11883	13849	14076	13910	13083	11732	13634	15184

Figure C displays the number of permits by type of quota permit from 2009 to 2016. The majority of permits are for overnight paddle followed by day use motor, then overnight motor. Overnight hiking accounts for the lowest number of permits.

Figure D displays the number of self-issue permits during the quota season and during the non-quota season from 2009 to 2016. Self-issue permit use during the quota season is greater than use during the non-quota season. See Part 5 for more information on self-issue permits.

Table 4 displays the number of quota permits issued, the number of quota permits that were cancelled and put back into the reservation system, as well as “no shows” (quota permits that were reserved, but not cancelled or issued) from 2009 to 2016.

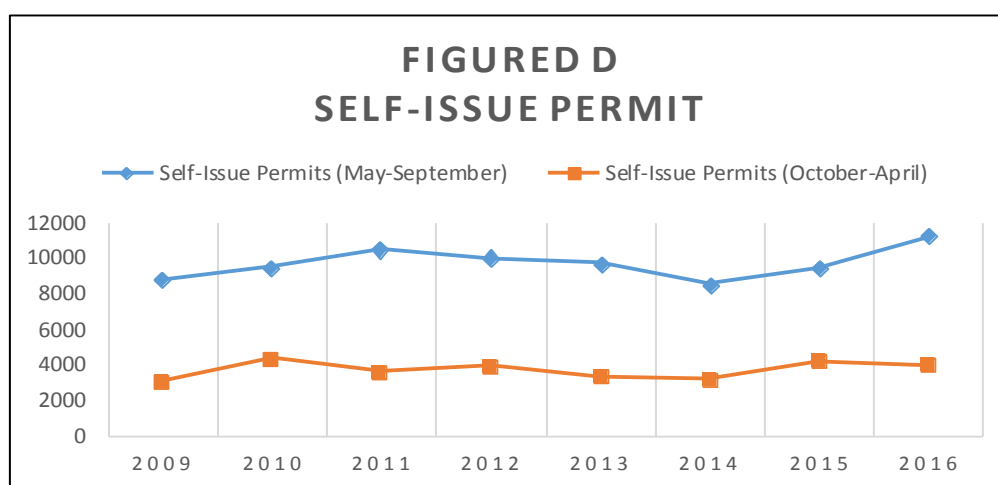
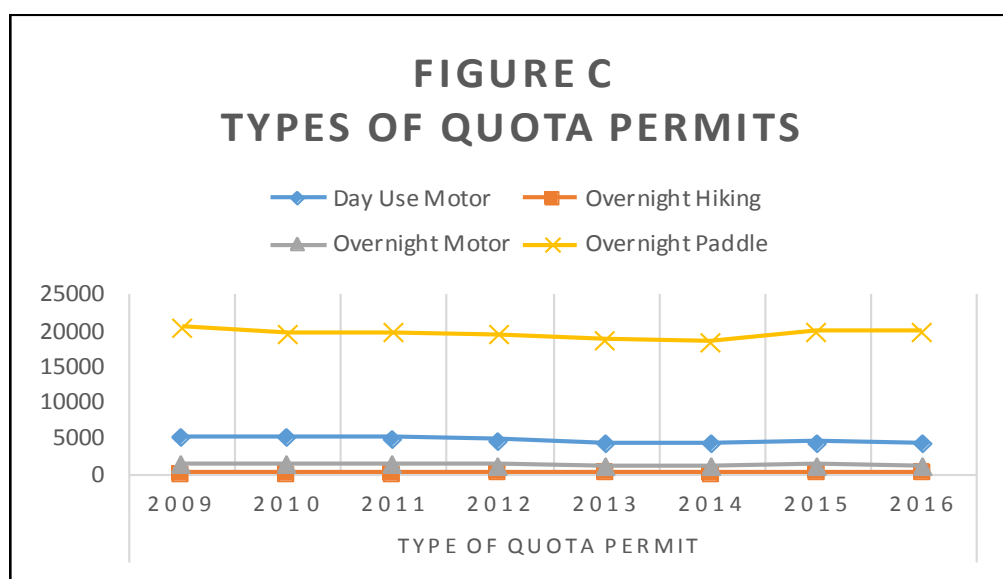


Table 4								
Quota Permit Status Trends								
Quota Permits	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Cancellations	3948	3782	4611	4006	4699	4564	4284	4883
No Shows	2273	2147	2189	1859	1869	2029	1787	1917
Issued Permits	27503	26651	26480	25966	24670	24301	26094	25898

Part 3. Quota and Self-Issue Visitor Information

Table 5 displays the number of BWCAW visitors from 2009 to 2016. It shows the overnight quota season visitors, day use motor quota visitors, and self-issue permit visitors during the quota and non-quota seasons.

Figure E displays the number of overnight and day use motor quota visitors and self-issue permit visitors from 2009 to 2016. The majority of visitors are overnight quota permit visitors followed by self-issue permit visitors during the quota season, followed by day use motor quota visitors during the quota season. Self-issue visitors during the non-quota season account for the smallest group of visitors.

Table 5 Number of Quota and Self-Issue Visitors								
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Overnight Quota Visitors	91783	87490	87712	86078	81541	79414	85299	86543
Day Use Motor Quota Visitors	22248	21291	21446	21179	19443	18294	19581	18620
Self-Issue Quota Season Visitors	28595	29134	33360	32207	33882	28144	30353	35409
Self-Issue Non-Quota Season Visitors	8994	12217	10713	11679	11318	10179	13642	15039
Total Visitors	151620	150132	153231	151143	146183	136054	148877	155611

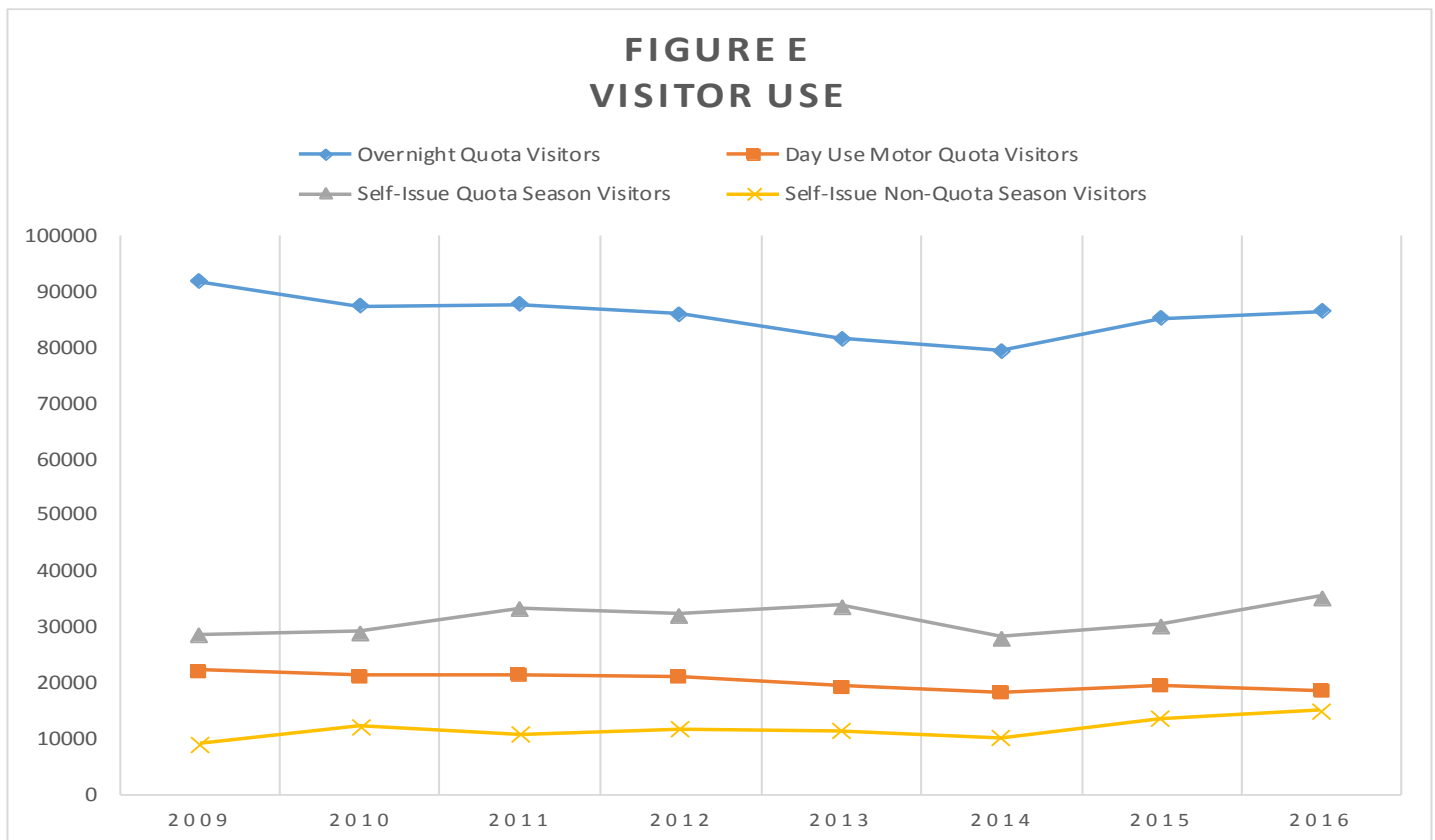


Table 6 displays the overnight quota visitor use demographics. This information is only collected from overnight quota permit reservations and not from day use motor or self-issue permit visitors. Interagency senior passes are lifetime passes for citizens or permanent residents of the U.S. age 62 or older. Access passes are lifetime passes for citizens or permanent residents of the U.S. who have a permanent disability regardless of age. The purchase of a BWCAW seasonal fee card fulfills the user fee requirements for the season, but does not eliminate the need for obtaining a quota permit for each trip. Tribal membership cards are available to local tribal members.

Table 6								
Overnight Quota Demographics								
	Adult	Youth	Pass Holders					
			Interagency Pass			BWCAW Seasonal Fee Cards		Tribal Membership Cards
			Senior	Access	Youth Access	Adult	Youth	
2009	69751	20565	1016	85	2	336	14	14
2010	66722	19322	956	84	9	374	15	8
2011	66198	19941	1067	96	5	383	1	21
2012	65391	19128	1183	95	7	245	2	27
2013	61537	18465	1173	61	11	286	0	8
2014	60044	17705	1328	79	5	229	5	19
2015	64725	18590	1590	107	5	265	3	14
2016	65508	18845	1782	135	4	261	7	3

Part 4. Lottery Trends

Prior to 2012, the Forest Service ran a lottery system for all entry points. Visitors applied for quota permits for a specific entry date and entry point. They would then wait for the lottery to be run to find out if they were successful in obtaining a permit.

The Forest Service proposed to eliminate the lottery in 2011 because the current reservation system is capable of making real-time reservations. Visitors can now see the entry points and dates that are available and make reservations for the date and entry point desired. The Forest Service eliminated the lottery for all entry points except for the five entry points where the demand for permits generally exceeds the number of permits available. The lottery continues to be used for day use motor entry points F (Moose to Newfound and Sucker), G (Moose to Basswood), D (Fall to Basswood), and overnight paddle or motor entry points 25 (Moose Lake) and 24 (Fall Lake).

	Successful	Unsuccessful	Total
2012	3845	3373	7218
2013	3699	4473	8172
2014	3848	5095	8943
2015	3867	6229	10096
2016	4209	7822	12031
2017	4296	9003	13299

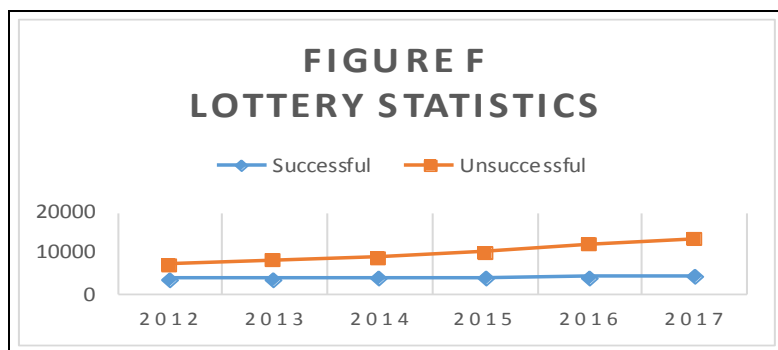


Table 7 and Figure F display the successful and unsuccessful lottery applications from 2012 to 2017. Data shows that the number of successful lottery applications has remained fairly constant, whereas the number of unsuccessful applications has increased. During the lottery visitors can submit as many applications as desired. Successful applicants are encouraged to cancel permits they are unable to use. Cancelled permits are put back into the system and are then available to other visitors.

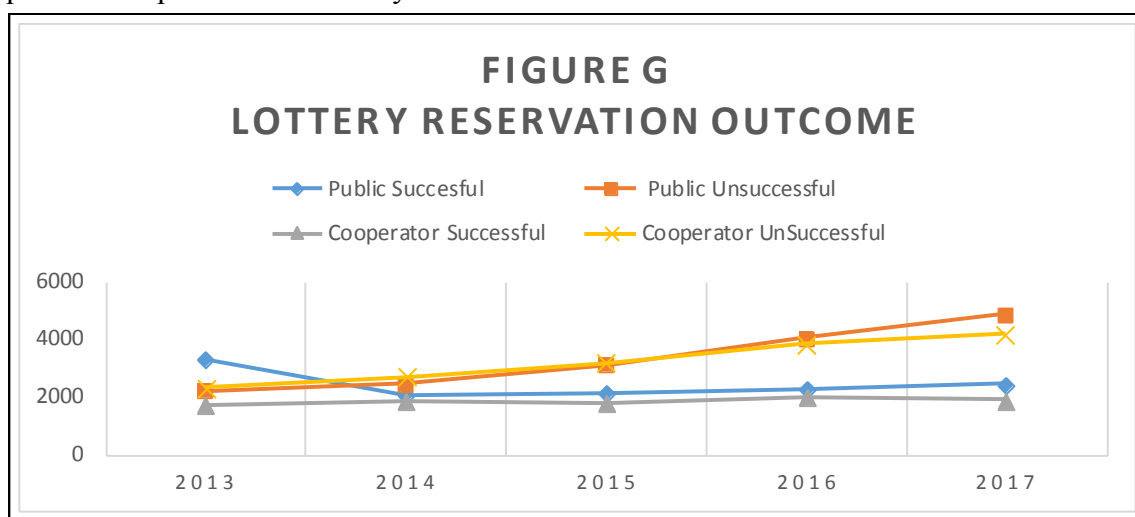


Figure G shows the successful and unsuccessful lottery reservations based on overall lottery applications that are submitted by the public and those submitted by cooperators. Cooperators are businesses approved to issue permits and they can also submit lottery applications for confirmed clients. Both the public and cooperators submitted more lottery applications during 2015-2017, than during 2013 and 2014.

Table 8 and Figure H display the number of successful and unsuccessful lottery applications for day use motor quota permits. Day use motor applicants account for the greatest number of lottery applications and nearly all of the available day use motor permits are obtained during the lottery. Day use motor applications have been increasing, resulting in an increase in the number of unsuccessful lottery applications.

Table 8		
Day Use Motor Lottery Application		
	Successful	Unsuccessful
2012	2257	2878
2013	2314	3827
2014	2508	4255
2015	2561	5222
2016	2717	6596
2017	2828	7765

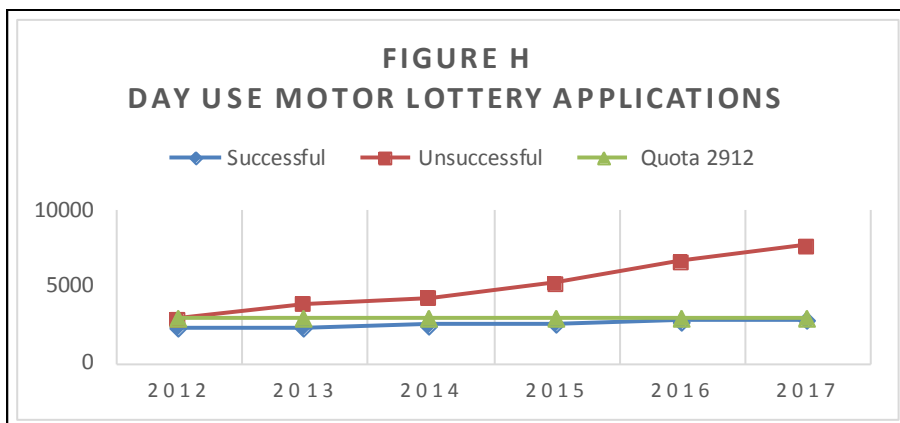


Table 9 and Figure I display the successful and unsuccessful lottery applications for overnight motor permits. Nearly all of the available overnight motor permits are obtained during the lottery. Since 2013, there has been an increase in the number of overnight motor lottery applications, resulting in an increase in unsuccessful lottery applications.

Table 9		
Overnight Motor Lottery Applications		
	Successful	Unsuccessful
2012	687	464
2013	709	644
2014	710	840
2015	708	1007
2016	709	1225
2017	730	1218

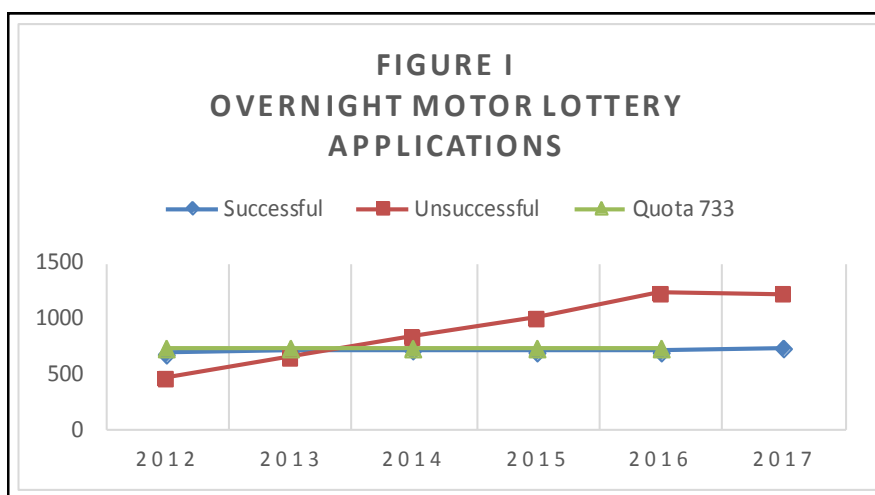
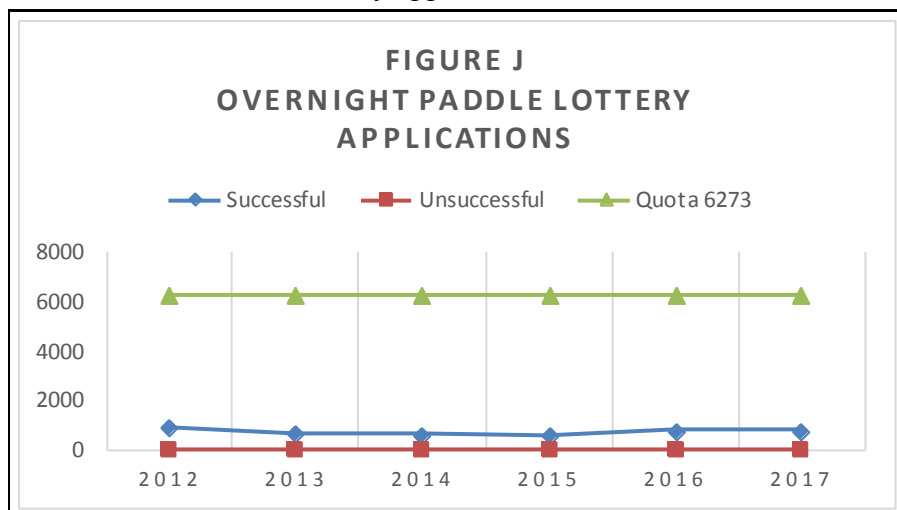


Table 10 and Figure J display the successful and unsuccessful lottery applications for overnight paddle permits. The data shows that nearly all overnight paddle applicants are successful during the lottery and that the number of permits available greatly exceeds the number of lottery applications.

Table 10		
Overnight Paddle Lottery Applications		
	Successful	Unsuccessful
2012	901	31
2013	676	1
2014	630	0
2015	598	0
2016	783	1
2017	781	1



Part 5. Self-Issue Permit Use Trends

Self-issue permits are required for all day use visitors during the quota season (May 1 to September 30) and all visitors (day use visitors and overnight visitors) during the non-quota season (October 1 to April 30). Self-issue permits are required for non-motorized day use visitors during the quota season and non-quota season, all overnight use (motorized and non-motorized) during the non-quota season, and any motorized day use on Little Vermilion, Loon, Lac La Croix (not beyond the south end of Snow Bay) and Loon River.

Self-issue permits are available at all entry points and visitors are required to fill them out before entering the wilderness and have them in possession while in the wilderness. Visitors might not always fill them out accurately. For instance, some permits claim snowmobile use during the quota season when such use would not be occurring. Data included in the following tables is based on what visitors record on the permits.

The self-issue permit lists nine different methods of travel which includes: canoe, kayak, foot, motorboat, paddleboard, dogsled, ski, snowshoe, and a blank space for other methods of travel.

Tables 11 – 19 display the number of self-issue permits for during the quota season and during the non-quota season by type of permit form 2009 to 2016.

Table 11								
Self-Issue Permits and Visitors								
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total Self-Issue Permits	11883	13849	14076	13910	13083	11732	13634	15184
Self-Issue Permits (May-September)	8832	9506	10488	9992	9738	8553	9466	11194
Self-Issue Permits (October-April)	3051	4343	3588	3918	3345	3179	4168	3990
Total Individuals	37589	41351	44073	43886	45200	38323	43995	50448
Average Party Size	3.16	2.99	3.13	3.15	3.45	3.27	3.22	3.32

Table 12—2009 Number of Self-Issue Permits

Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	5542	771	6313
Ski	0	366	366
Boat (motor)	748	136	884
Snowshoe	3	367	370
Foot (hiking)	2478	987	3465
Dog Sled	0	223	223
Snowmobile	2	180	182
Boat (non- motor)	10	3	13
Hiking with stock (horses)	1	0	1
Other (non-motor)	48	16	64
Other (motor)	0	2	2
Totals	8832	3051	11883

Table 13—2010 Number of Self-Issue Permits

Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	6580	1564	8144
Ski	0	476	476
Boat (motor)	333	216	549
Snowshoe	0	316	316
Foot (hiking)	2526	1344	3870
Dog Sled	0	329	329
Snowmobile	0	81	81
Boat (non- motor)	13	4	17
Hiking with stock (horses)	0	0	0
Other (non-motor)	51	13	64
Other (motor)	3	0	3
Totals	9506	4343	13849

Table 14—2011 Number of Self-Issue Permits

Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	7448	873	8321
Ski	3	493	496
Boat (motor)	566	171	737
Snowshoe	0	474	474
Foot (hiking)	2390	1240	3630
Dog Sled	0	211	211
Snowmobile	0	102	102
Boat (non- motor)	11	5	16
Hiking with stock (horses)	2	0	2
Other (non-motor)	67	13	80
Other (motor)	1	6	7
Totals	10488	3588	14076

Table 15—2012 Number of Self-Issue Permits

Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	6773	1115	7888
Ski	2	494	496
Boat (motor)	525	245	770
Snowshoe	0	240	240
Foot (hiking)	2590	1588	4178
Dog Sled	0	166	166
Snowmobile	0	43	43
Boat (non- motor)	38	4	42
Hiking with stock (horses)	1	0	1
Other (non-motor)	55	20	75
Other (motor)	8	3	11
Totals	9992	3918	13910

Table 16—2013 Number of Self-Issue Permits

Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	6762	819	7581
Ski	2	516	518
Boat (motor)	353	200	553
Snowshoe	0	384	384
Foot (hiking)	2536	1026	3562
Dog Sled	1	279	280
Snowmobile	0	109	109
Boat (non- motor)	33	1	34
Hiking with stock (horses)	0	0	0
Other (non-motor)	49	11	60
Other (motor)	2	0	2
Totals	9738	3345	13083

Table 17—2014 Number of Self-Issue Permits

Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	6121	746	6867
Ski	5	500	505
Boat (motor)	418	259	677
Snowshoe	2	333	335
Foot (hiking)	1961	1011	2972
Dog Sled	4	286	290
Snowmobile	0	32	32
Boat (non- motor)	9	6	15
Hiking with stock (horses)	0	0	0
Other (non-motor)	31	6	37
Other (motor)	2	0	2
Totals	8553	3179	11732

Table 18—2015 Number of Self-Issue Permits			
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	6416	1064	7480
Ski	0	505	505
Boat (motor)	116	327	443
Snowshoe	0	287	287
Foot (hiking)	2865	1631	4496
Dog Sled	3	255	258
Snowmobile	0	88	88
Boat (non- motor)	10	2	12
Hiking with stock (horses)	0	0	0
Other (non-motor)	54	8	62
Other (motor)	2	1	3
Totals	9466	4168	13634

Table 19—2016 Number of Self-Issue Permits			
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	8062	1117	9179
Ski	1	426	427
Boat (motor)	107	268	375
Snowshoe	1	244	245
Foot (hiking)	2954	1475	4429
Dog Sled	3	230	233
Snowmobile	0	204	204
Boat (non- motor)	13	2	15
Hiking with stock (horses)	0	0	0
Other (non-motor)	48	20	68
Other (motor)	5	4	9
Totals	11194	3990	15184

Part 6. Exempt Permit Information and Use Trends

There are three types of visitor uses that are exempt from both the quota and self-issue permit systems, and these visitors are issued exempt permits. The three exempt visitor groups include: 1) Day use motor visitors who are either an overnight homeowner guest or resort owner guest and are visiting a lake that is named in BWCAW Act of 1978, are exempt from the day use motor quotas on that particular lake; 2) Authorized researchers with a government agency or researchers working in partnership with the Superior National Forest may be exempt from overnight paddle quotas and possibly motor quotas depending on the project need; and 3) Volunteers or other work groups with permission to work on a specific project may be exempt from paddle quotas and possibly motor quotas depending on the project need. The number of exempt permits issued during the quota and non-quota seasons are displayed in **Tables 19-26**. **Figure K** displays the number of exempt permits by visitor group from 2009-2016.

In addition to the exempt permits for guests of home and resort owners visiting a lake that is named in the 1978 BWCAW Act, those homeowners and resort owners are also exempt from the day use motor quota on the particular lake where they own a residence or resort. They are given boat stickers that serve as an exempt day use motor permit allowing residents to travel into the Wilderness on that particular lake without getting a separate quota permit. However, those use numbers do not show up in the tables below as they are not tracked.

Table 19		
2009 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	188	1
Boat (motor)	1062	0
Foot (hiking)	20	3
Other	4	0
Totals	1274	4

Table 20		
2010 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	229	0
Boat (motor)	1661	13
Foot (hiking)	24	0
Other	8	0
Totals	1922	13

Table 21		
2011 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	48	0
Boat (motor)	674	0
Foot (hiking)	1	0
Other	4	0
Totals	727	0

Table 22		
2012 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	63	0
Boat (motor)	726	0
Foot (hiking)	10	0
Other	9	0
Totals	808	0

Table 23 2013 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	57	0
Boat (motor)	1066	0
Foot (hiking)	8	0
Other	0	0
Totals	1131	0

Table 24		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	42	0
Boat (motor)	653	6
Foot (hiking)	11	0
Other	70	0
Totals	776	6

Table 25 2015 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	60	0
Boat (motor)	705	2
Foot (hiking)	5	0
Other	3	0
Totals	773	2

Table 26 2016 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	28	1
Boat (motor)	662	1
Foot (hiking)	3	0
Other	0	0
Totals	693	2

Figure K
Exempt Permits by Visitor Group

